

Stress & Workers' Comp

August 2016



Dr. Michael Lacroix,
Licensed Psychologist (FL)
Director, Behavioral Health Services – Coventry
Associate Medical Director, Aetna Disability

Feeling Stressed? Who Isn't?

- How are you managing it?
- Can you do better?



Scary Stats

According to the APA, job stress costs US businesses \$300 billion related to:

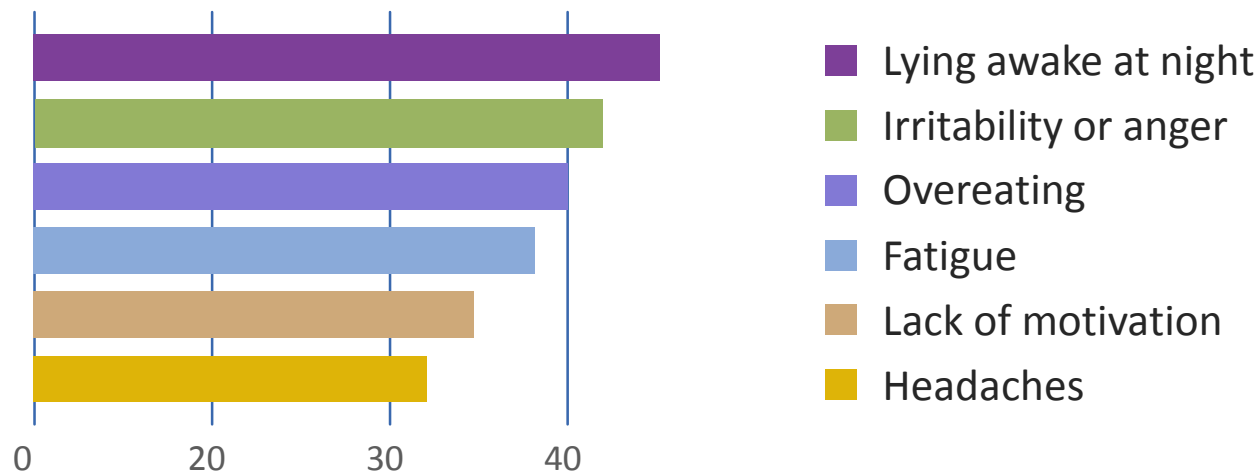
- Medical
- Legal
- Insurance costs
- Loss of productivity
- Absenteeism
- Turnover



The Impact of Stress on Health

1/2 of Americans self-report that they are “struggling” with life today and **1/3** state their average stress level as “extreme.”

Stress affects work productivity...

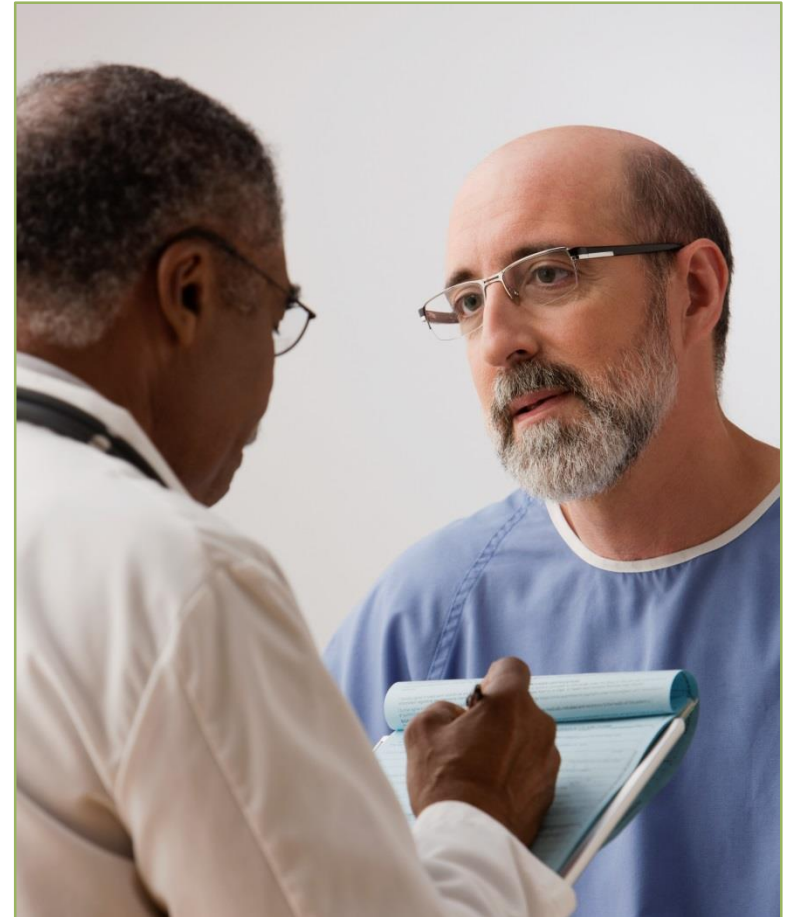


...and drives health care costs up 46%



What We Know

- 50 – 80% of all reported medical illnesses have a stress-related component¹
- People with high utilization of medical service have 4 times the prevalence of depression and anxiety¹
- Depression costs \$51 billion a year in absenteeism, \$26 billion in direct cost²



¹Healthy People, “Mental Health and Mental Disorders” (chapter 18), NIH and SAMHSA, January 2013.

²Mental Illness: Facts and Numbers,” National Alliance on Mental Illness, October 2013.

Outline

- The science of stress
- The signs of stress
- Stress appraisal
- Strategies for managing stress



Stress: A Normal Response Life's Demands

- Having stress is not bad in itself. What *is* bad is experiencing excessive or prolonged stress.
- Survival mechanism
- Protects the person
- Generates fight reaction
- Generates flight reaction
- Enables rapid reactions to a changing situation
- Enhances survival thinking
- Enables perceptual focusing to eliminate distractions

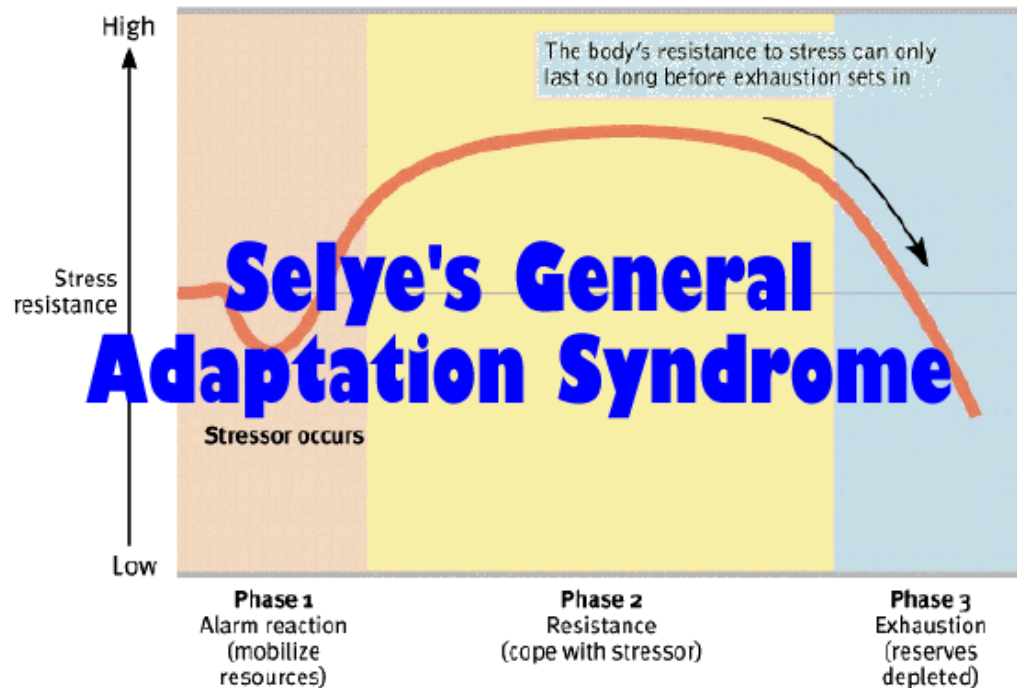
A Bit of History: Hans Selye (1907-1982)

- Father of stress
- Borrowed “stress” from physics
- Initially defined stress as the non-specific response of an organism to any demand placed upon it
- Later narrowed stress to refer to the consequences of the failure of a human or animal to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats, whether actual or imagined.
- In Selye's terminology, "stress" refers to the reaction of the organism, and "stressor" to the perceived threat



Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)

In the '30s Selye showed that animals present a very similar series of reactions to stress, which he broke into three stages:



Selye identified the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis as the system mediating the stress response.

What this means to you

- There are psychological consequence of stress at every stage
- GAS may be a useful “context”; use this as a framework for looking at the broader impact of the stressor

Stage 1: Alarm

- Physiological and psychological resources are mobilized to fight the stressor
- Adrenaline is produced to bring about the “fight or flight” response
- Even early on, there can be negative psychological consequences

Alarm Stage

- Anxiety or fear
- Sorrow or depression
- Shock or confusion

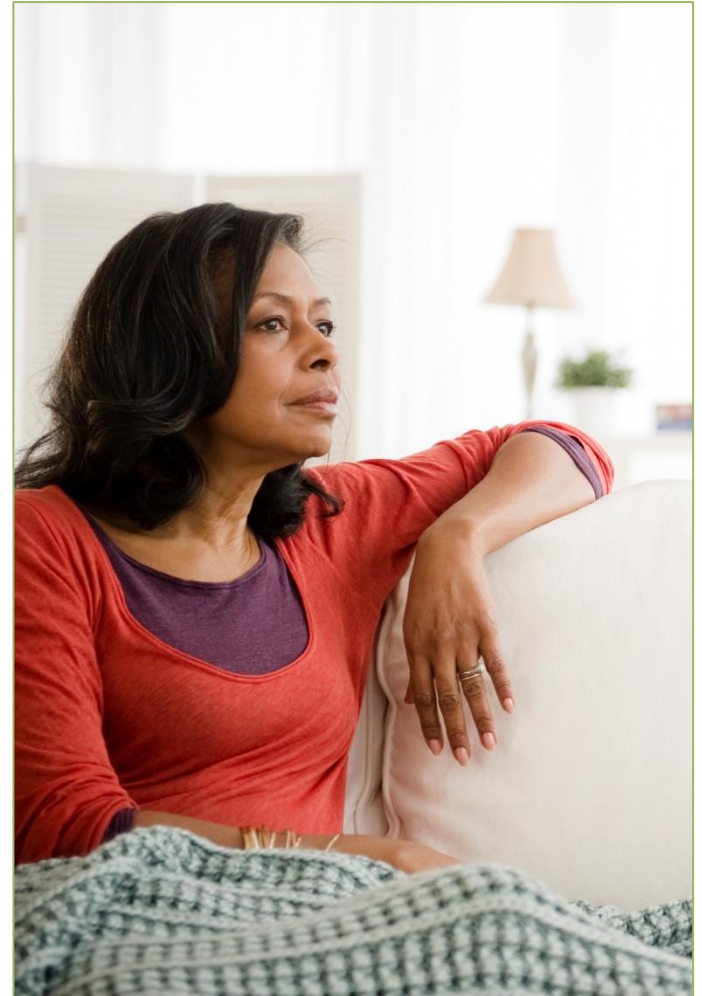
Self Correcting

Stage 2: Resistance

- Aggression
- Regression
- Repression
- Withdrawal
- Fixation

Also known as the Coping Stage

- Can go on for some time
- If the stressor persists, the body needs to start coping, but this cannot be kept up indefinitely as resources become depleted



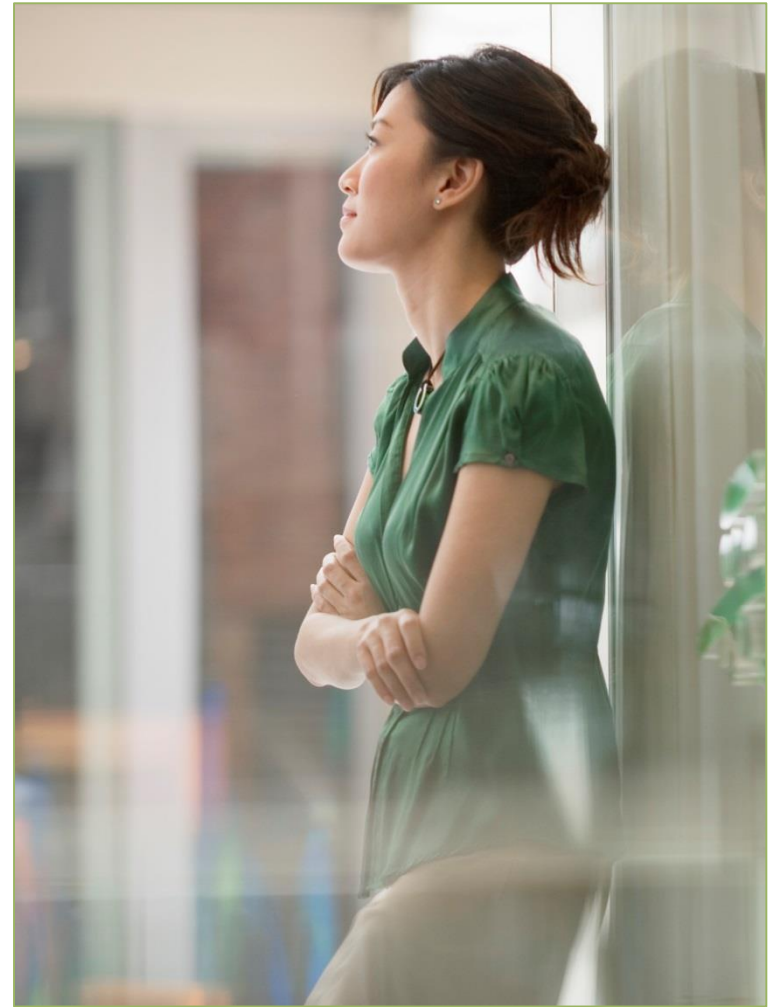
Stage 3: Exhaustion

- Exhaustion Stage
 - Physiological
 - Headache, cold, flu
- Psychological
 - Severe depression
- Interpersonal
 - End of relationships
- Inability to defend against stressors
- The body's resources are depleted as it cannot maintain normal functioning.
- Negative health consequences include adrenal gland and immune system functions, and illnesses including ulcers, depression, diabetes, digestive and cardiovascular diseases, etc.

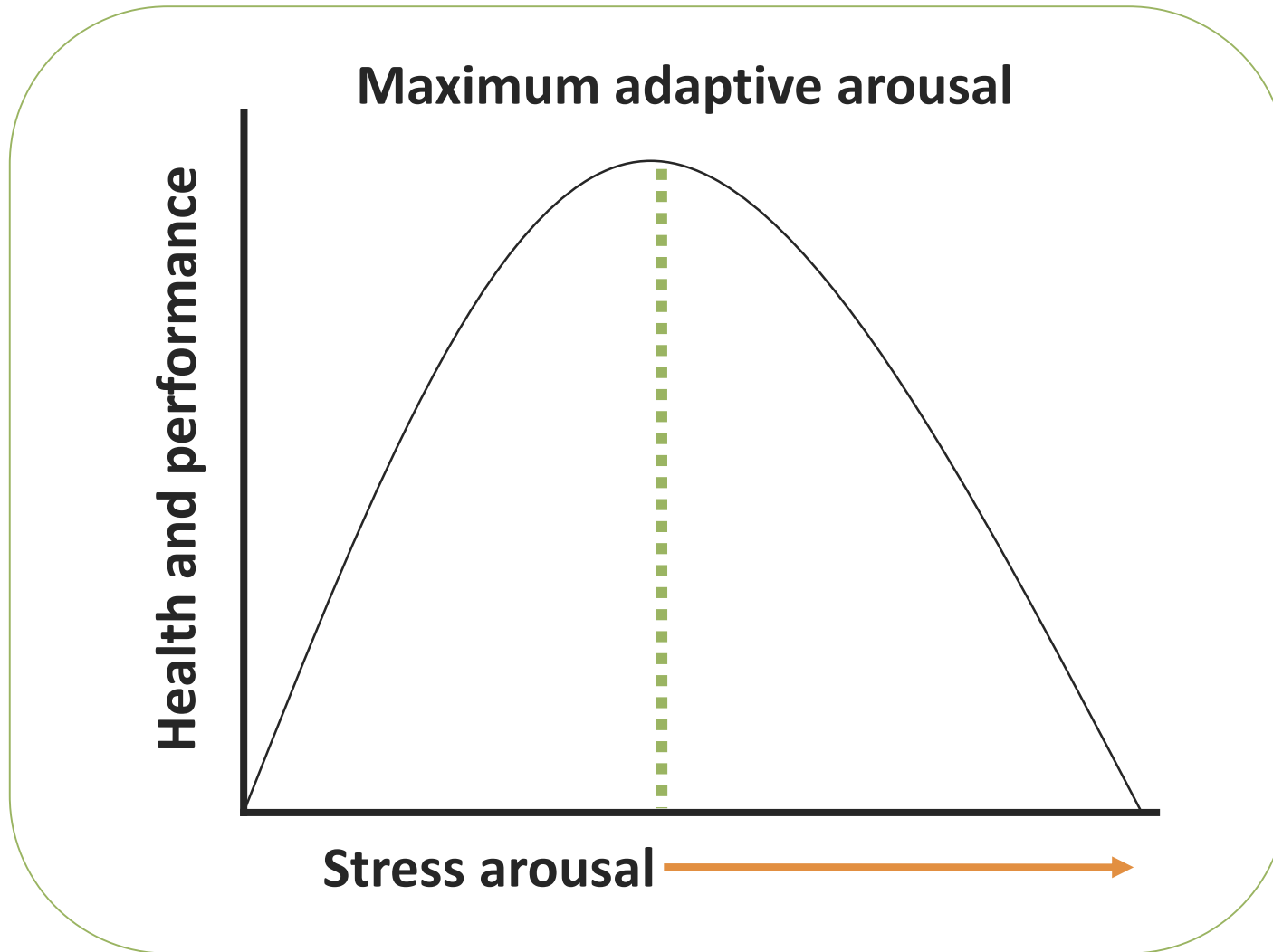
It Doesn't Have to Be All Bad

Selye (1975) distinguished between

- Eustress (from the Greek for “good stress), where stress enhances functioning, such as through challenging work or strength training, and,
- Distress, persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation, and may lead to anxiety or withdrawal (depression) behavior.



Stress Is Not Really All Bad: Stress Curve



Stress Nowadays

- Now used generally as a catch-all for any perceived difficulties in life.
- It covers a huge range of phenomena from mild irritation to the kind of severe problems that might result in a real breakdown of health
- Signs of excessive stress include
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Cognitive
 - Behavioral



Physical Signs of Excessive Stress

- Dry mouth
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Racing heart
- Chills
- Gastro-intestinal distress
- Sweating
- Muscle tremors
- Elevated blood pressure



Emotional Signs of Excessive Stress

- Emotional shock
- Sadness / Depression
- Frustration
- Anger / Rage
- Irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Phobic reactions
- Withdrawal



Cognitive Signs of Excessive Stress

- Mental confusion
- Inability to concentrate
- Poor attention span
- Difficulties in problem solving
- Memory disruptions
- Impaired decision making
- Time distortions



Behavioral Signs of Excessive Stress

- Hypervigilance
- Intrusive thoughts
- Sleep disturbance; distressing dreams
- Appetite / weight disturbance
- Avoidance of workplace
- Social withdrawal
- Strained relationships



And Now for the Psychology Lesson...

- Lazarus and others argued that in order for a psychosocial situation to be stressful, it must be appraised as such.
- Cognitive processes of appraisal are central in determining whether a situation is potentially threatening, constitutes a harm/loss, a challenge, or is benign.

Bottom Line: Reality Is Perception

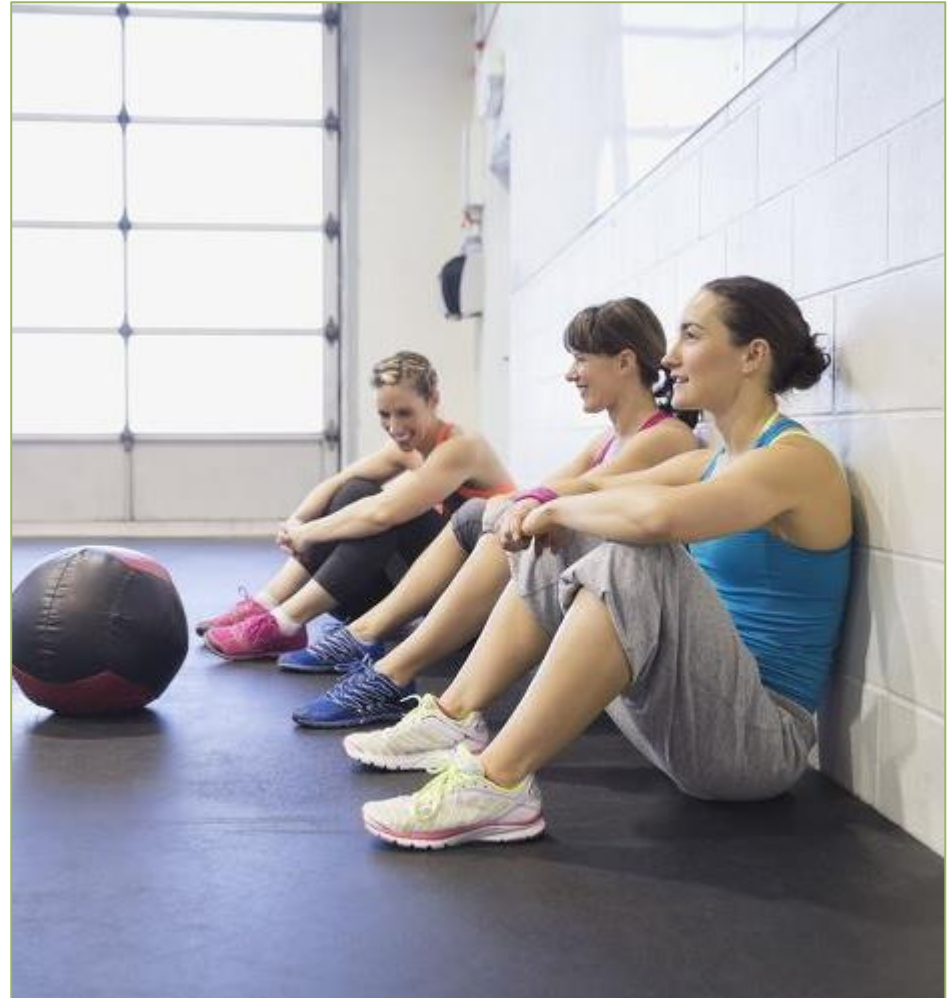
- Stress often has less to do with the event or the situation than with our perception of the meaning of the event or situation
- Conclusion: How we change people's perceptions is going to be a major key to stress management

How Do We Change Perceptions?

How do we get psychological distance from the events that stress us out?

Stress Management Strategies

- Humor
- Perspective
- Language / Thought
- Optimizing Your Time
- Learning to Say “No!”
- Physical Strategies
- Centering



Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I cannot accept,
and the wisdom to hide the bodies of those people
I had to kill today because they ticked me off.

And also, help me to be careful
Of the toes I step on today,
As they may be connected to the behind
That I may have to kiss tomorrow.
Help me to always give 100% at work....
12% on Monday
23% on Tuesday
0% on Wednesday
20% on Thursday
5% on Fridays

And help me to remember.....

When I'm having a really bad day,
and it seems that people are trying to tick me off,
that it takes 42 muscles to frown, but
only 4 to extend my arm and smack someone!

Amen

Stress Management – Humor

- We create a lot of our own stress
- The world can be an endless source of mirth
- Look to the left of you, look to the right of you
- Celebrities/politicians provide humor if you step back
- Find the funny, it's out there



We Create A Lot of Our Own Stress



Celebrities – An Endless Supply of Humor



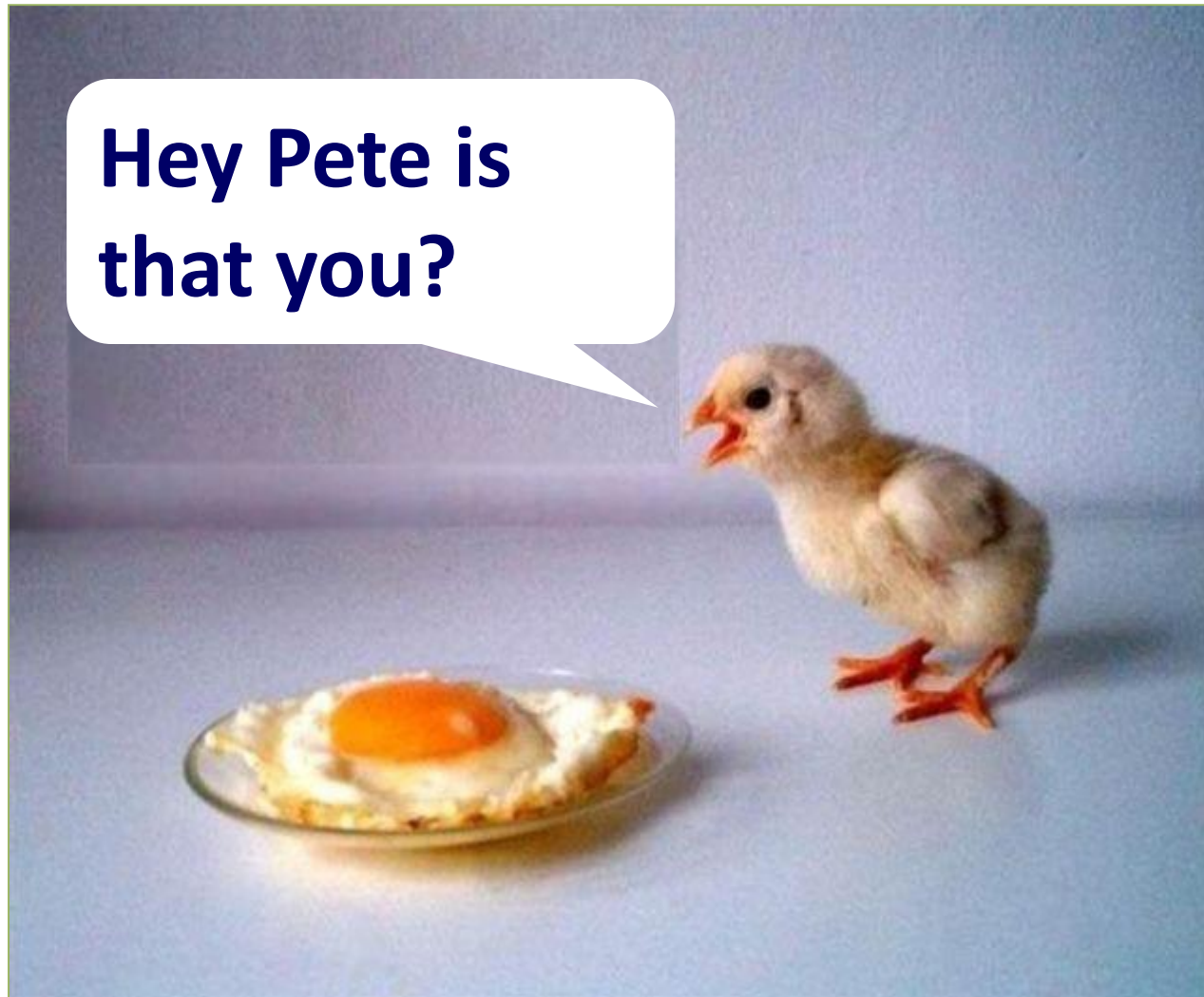
Find the funny!



Find the funny!



Find the funny!

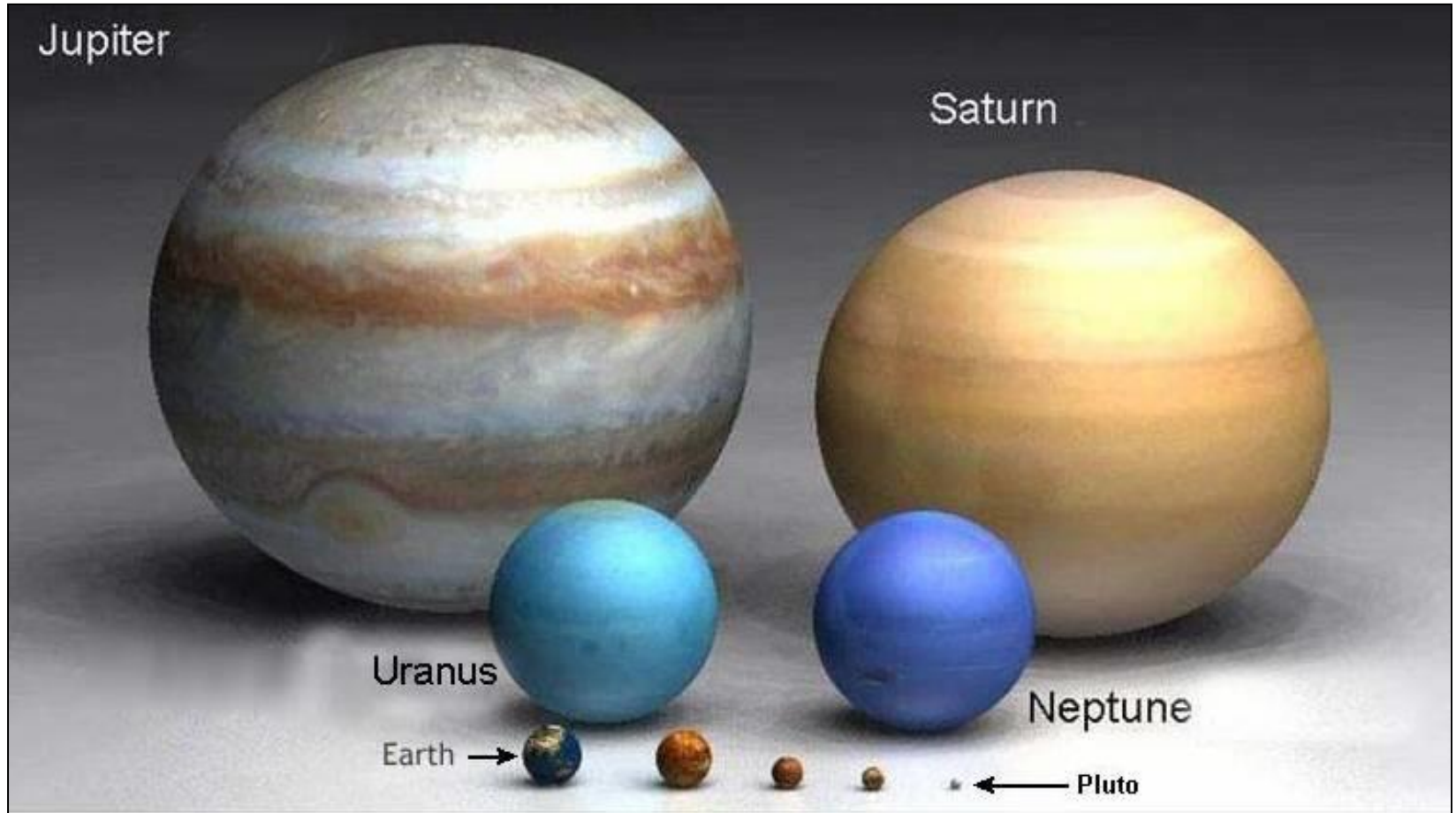


Stress Management – Perspective

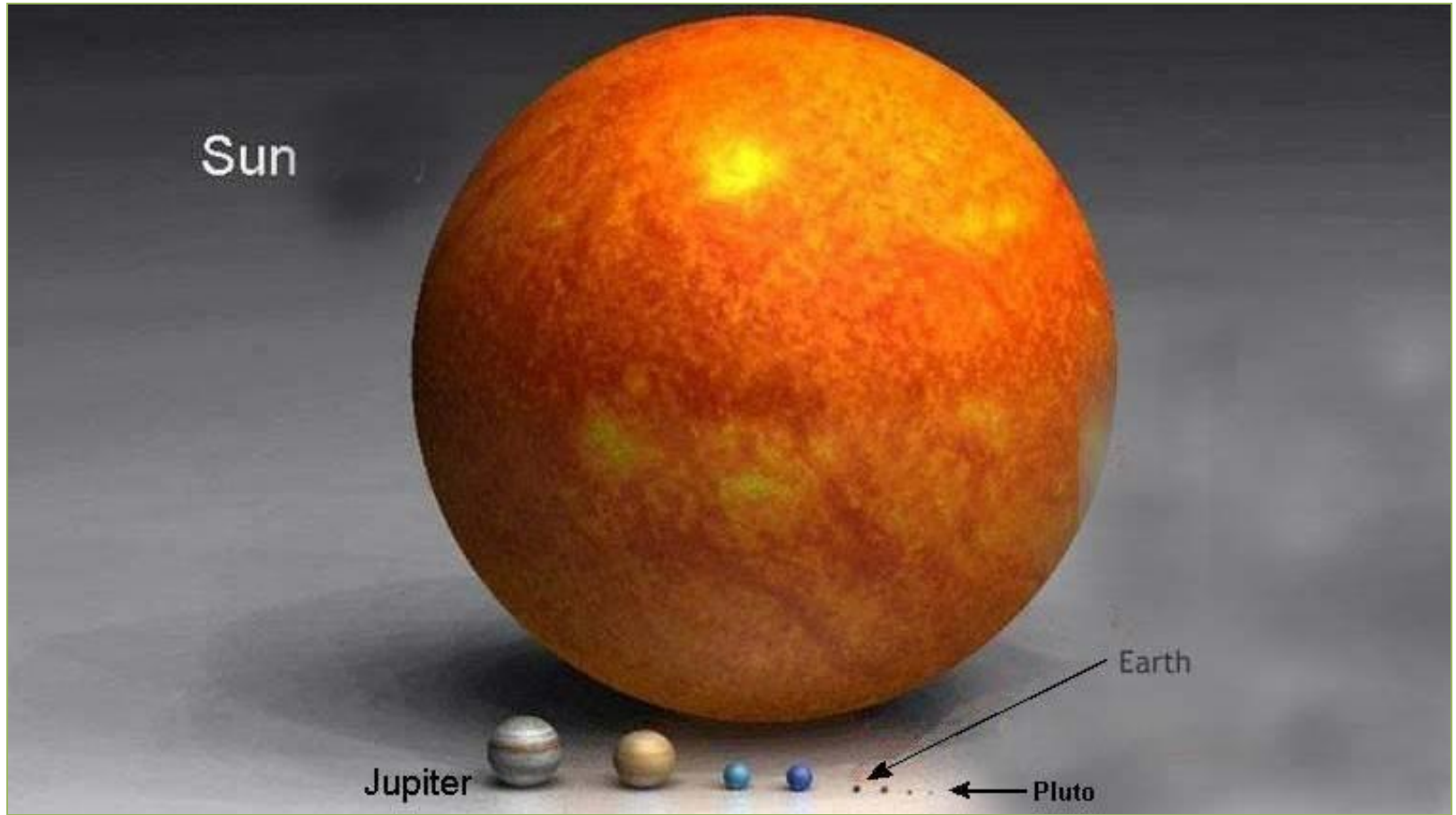
- Can you detach from a stressful situation and take a fresh look from a distance or from someone else's point of view?
- So you'll be late for a meeting, is that a “disaster”?
- So your Visa card charges a high interest rate, think of those who cannot afford credit cards
- As Eleanor Roosevelt observed, everything eventually comes to an end



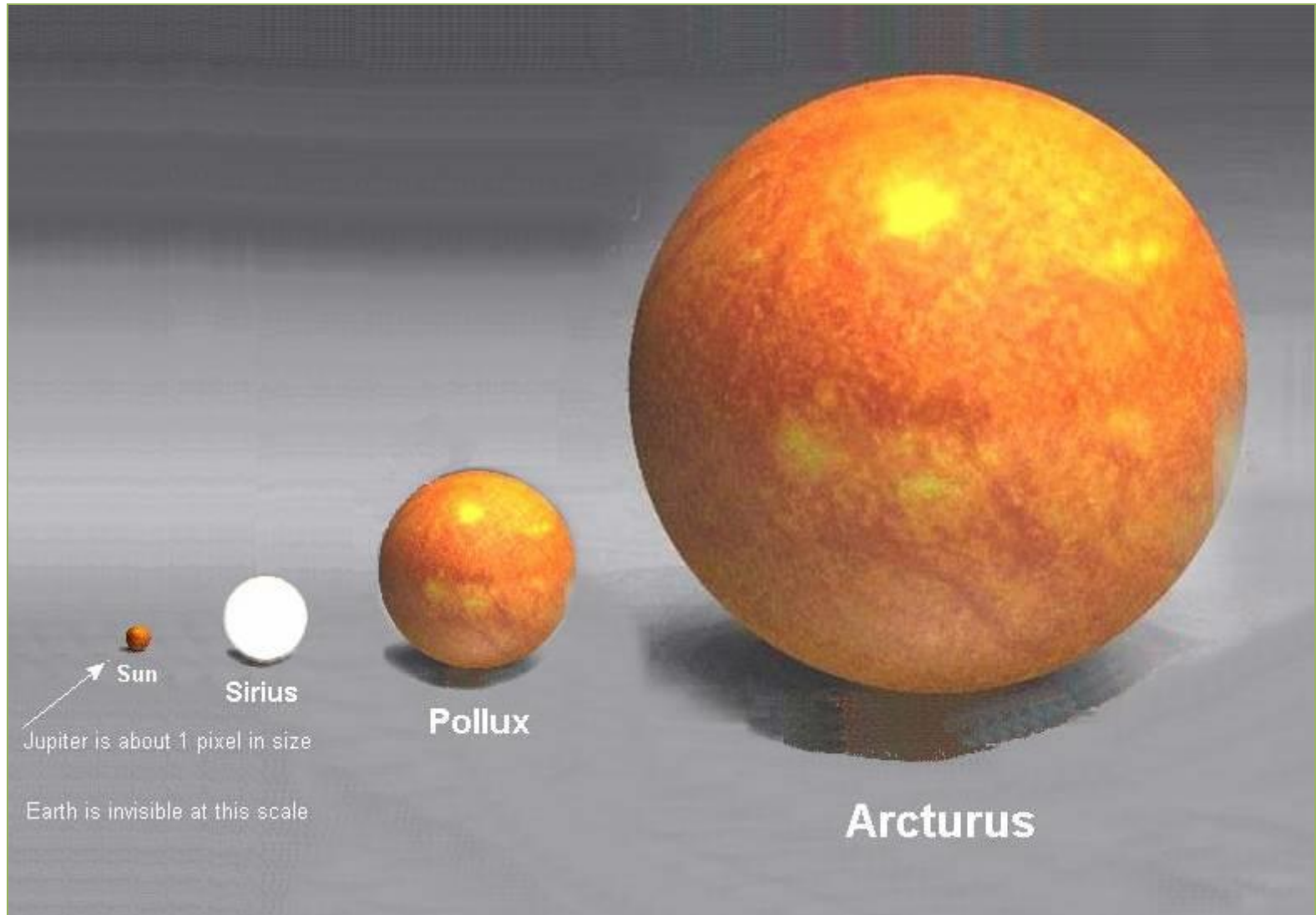
Finding Some Perspective



Finding Some Perspective



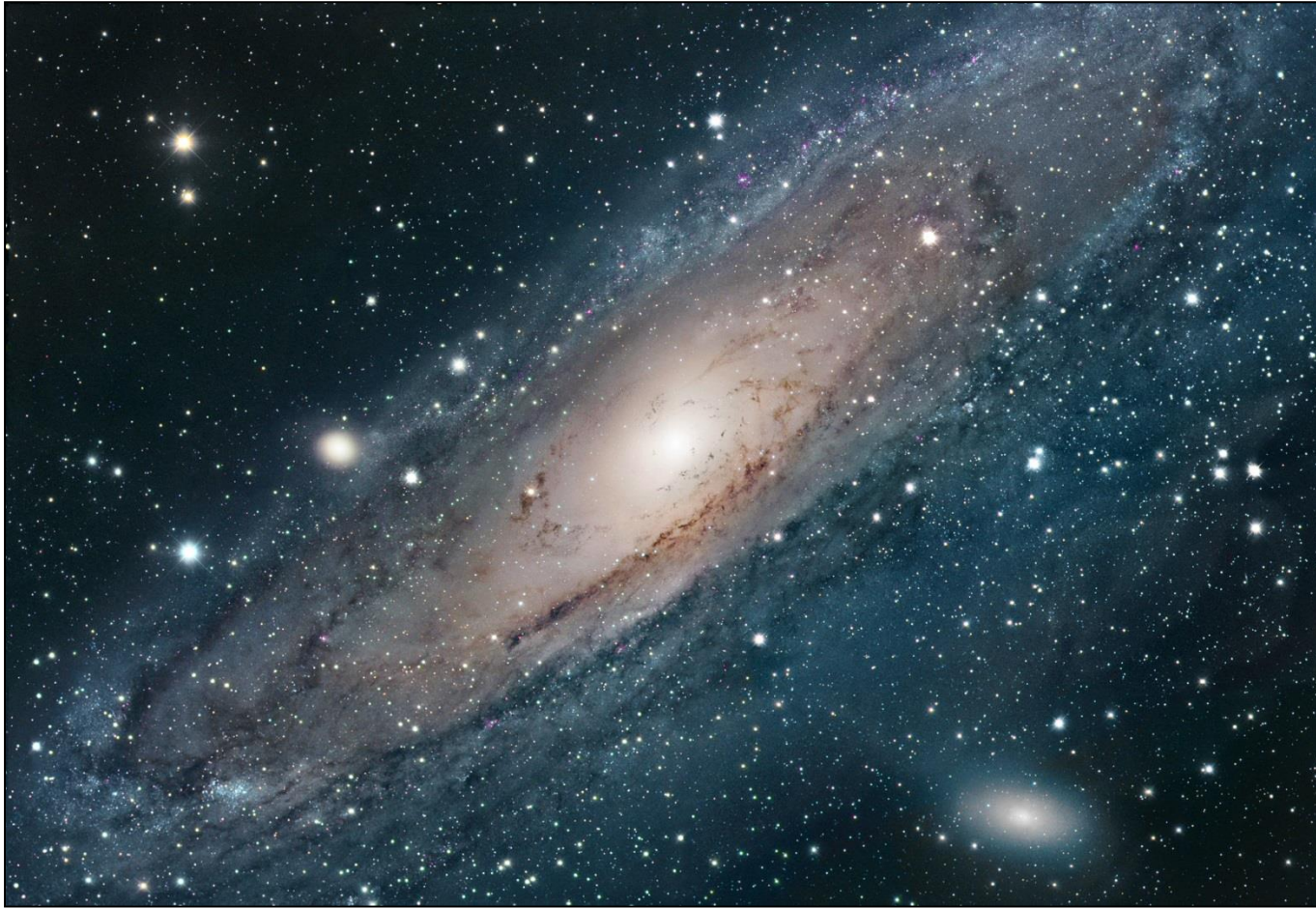
Finding Some Perspective



Feeling Stressed About Traffic?



How's the Traffic on Sirius 9?



Bills Getting to You?



There But for the Grace of God



How Big a Hurry Are You Really In?



No Pressure Here



Stress Management – Language/Thought

Words we tell ourselves: How do those make you feel?

- “Terrible”
- “Awful”
- “Nightmare”
- “I can’t stand it!”
- “This is killing me!”
- “I *can’t*”

What are your stress-producing thoughts?

Stress Management – Language/Thought

Alternatives: How do those make you feel?

- “Uncomfortable”
- “Annoying”
- “Difficult”
- “Inconvenient”
- “Disappointing”
- “I can”

What might work better for you?

Stress Management – Language/Thought

What are you telling yourself?

- “I am disabled”
- “I can’t work any more”
- “I can’t take it any more”
- “My pain controls my life now”
- “I have nothing to live for anymore”
- “This is the worst thing that ever happened to me”
- “My children hate me”
- “Everybody hates me”
- “I’ll never get promoted”
- “I’ll never be normal again”
- “This is the absolute end of me”

Stress Management – Language/Thought

Language opens the door to changing your thinking

- It tells you how you perceive your stressors
- Language is also the vehicle for changing those perceptions

It doesn't get more important than this!

“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”

William Jones

Stress Management – Language/Thought

Cognitions: The CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) Approach

- CBT is an approach to making changes in our lives that focuses on cognition (our thoughts) and on behavior (our actions).
- CBT is about the interaction between thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- Bottom line: “You feel the way you think.”
- But CBT also looks at behavior because the way you act is often determined by how you feel. And in turn, the way you act can have a positive or a negative impact on your feelings.
- CBT involves identifying thoughts, beliefs, and meanings that are activated by feelings, and assigning more accurate, less extreme meanings.

Stress Management – Language/Thought

CBT Focus on Basic Errors in Thinking

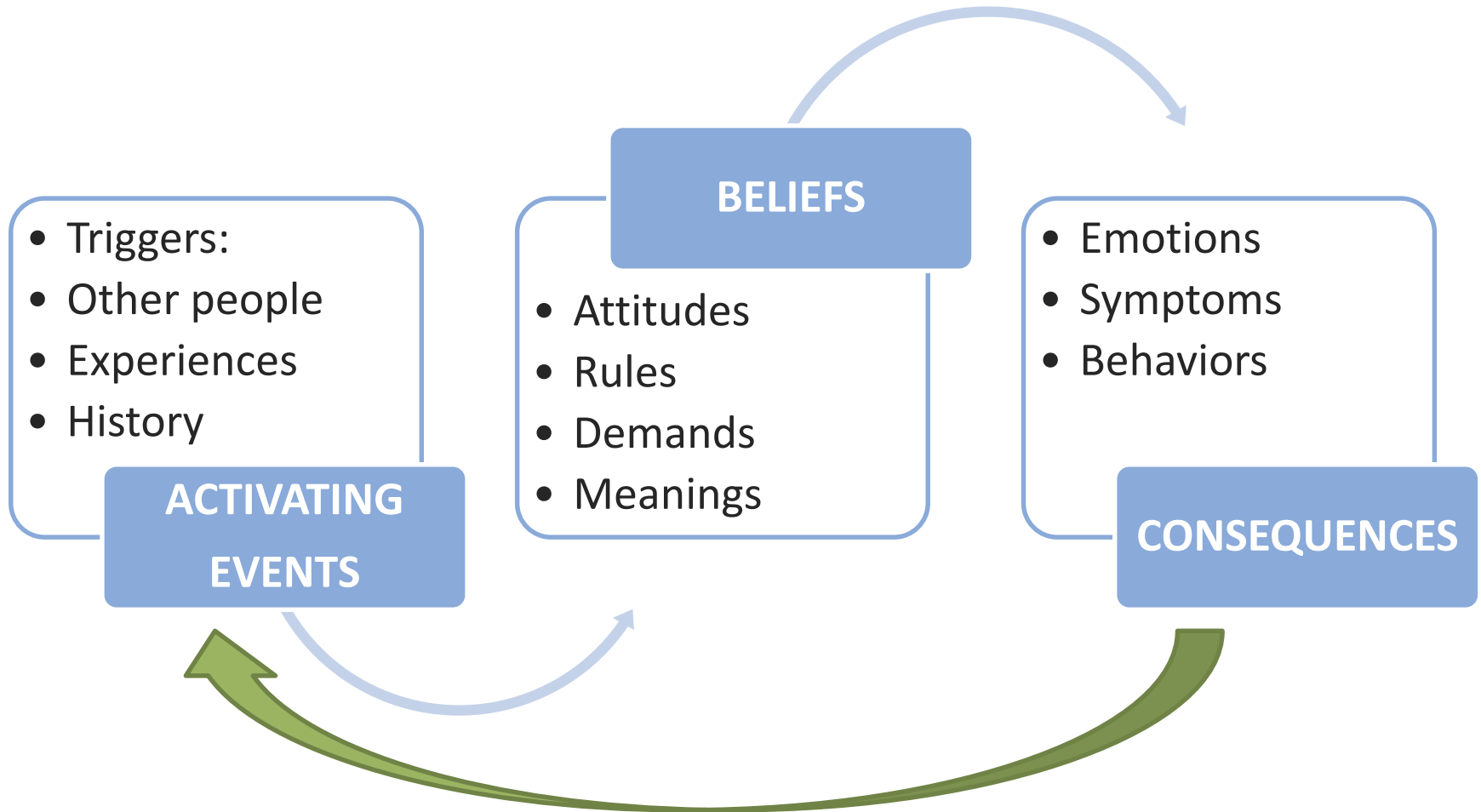
- Thinking errors have been compared to computer viruses: they introduce distortions that prevent us from dealing with information effectively, they cause us to jump to incorrect conclusions, with an impact on how we feel and how we behave, and on how others then impact back on us.
- Some common thinking errors:
 - **Catastrophizing:** Turning molehills into mountains
 - **All-or-nothing (black and white) thinking:** Extreme thinking that can lead to extreme emotions and extreme behaviors
 - **Mind-reading:** When you believe you know what others are thinking

Stress Management – Language/Thought

More Thinking Errors

- Overgeneralizing
 - Drawing global conclusions from individual events (“always ... never”)
- “Musturbatory” thinking
 - Beliefs rooted in “should” and “must”
- Disqualifying the positive
 - Transforming positive events into neutral, or negative events in your mind
- Low frustration tolerance
 - Equating uncomfortable with unbearable
- Personalizing
 - The tendency to personalize, to believe that random events are all about you

The CBT A-B-C Analysis



Stress Management – Language/Thought

Combating faulty thinking

- The key strategy: Behaving like a scientist:
 - Identify A-B-C's
 - Test validity of beliefs
- Describe the problem
- What is the belief / thought / theory related to that problem?
- What testable predictions would we make from that belief?
- Is there another competing belief / theory?
- If so, what predictions would we make from that belief?
- How would we test the (competing) predictions?
- What's the evidence?
- What do we conclude?

Stress Management – Language/Thought

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- We are all prone to errors in thinking – there is no shame in that
- Over-generalizing, personalizing, or catastrophizing from innocuous comments made by a friend does not require a diagnosis
- You don't need a clinical diagnosis to use the techniques
- CBT concepts and techniques are simple
 - They can be learned and used by those who simply want to make improvements in their lives

A-B-C Exercise

Think of a historical situation, something that happened to you some time ago and that you interpreted negatively, and that you remember well.

Complete the boxes:

- What triggered your reaction?
- What are the thoughts / beliefs / rules / demands / images / meanings that you attributed to the trigger?
- What kind of thinking error was this?
- What were the consequences of your thoughts – feelings – actions sequence?

A. Activating Event	
Belief/Meaning/Thoughts re: event	
Behavior/Emotional consequences	
Thinking error	
Consequences	



Combating Faulty Thinking Exercise

Let's take that same situation. Now, consider how you might address these thoughts / beliefs / fears in the future so as to dial down your frustration and theirs, keep the anger (or whatever) under control, and come up with more effective outcomes.

A. Activating Event	
B. Belief / Meaning / Thoughts re: event	
C. Behavioral / Emotional consequences	
Thinking error	
Dispute: Question and examine B and generate alternatives and evidence	
Effects of alternative thoughts / beliefs	

Stress Management – Optimizing Your Time

What can you do to take control of your time?

- Schedule yourself better
- Stop procrastinating!
- Check your motives
- Task triage
- Set realistic deadlines
- One task at a time
- Reward yourself when something gets done!



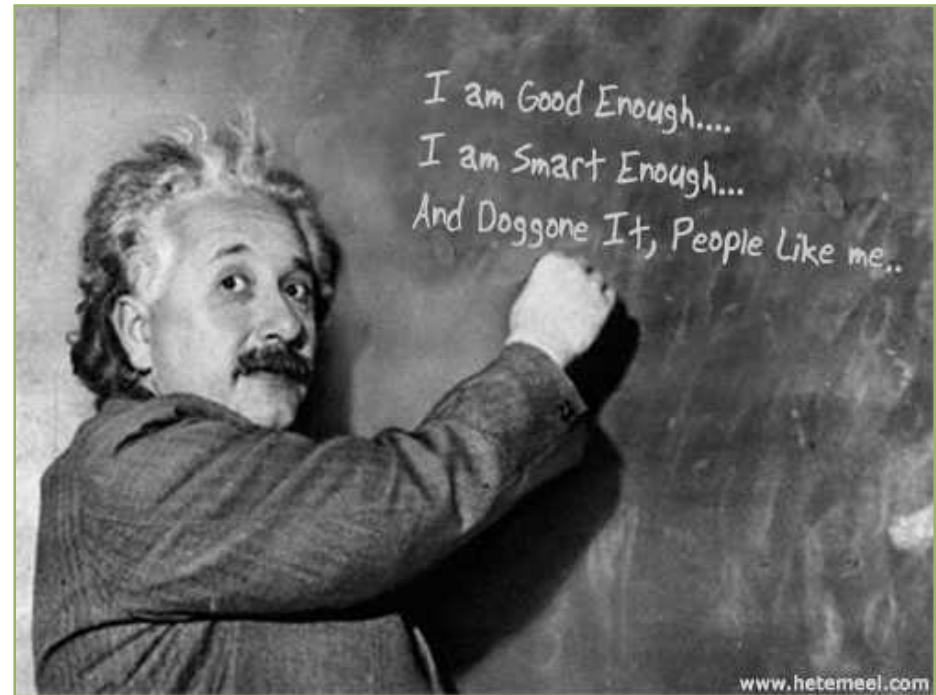
Stress Management – Stop Procrastinating

- Check your motives
- Task triage
- Set realistic deadlines
- One task at a time
- Reward yourself when something gets done!



Stress Management – Saying No

- It is less stressful to say no when asked than to end up saying no later
- You are entitled to say no
 - “Because I’m good enough!”
 - “I’m smart enough!”
 - “And doggone it, people like me!”





Self-Examination Question

What are the beliefs that you have that are limiting you from making changes?



Stress Management – Physical

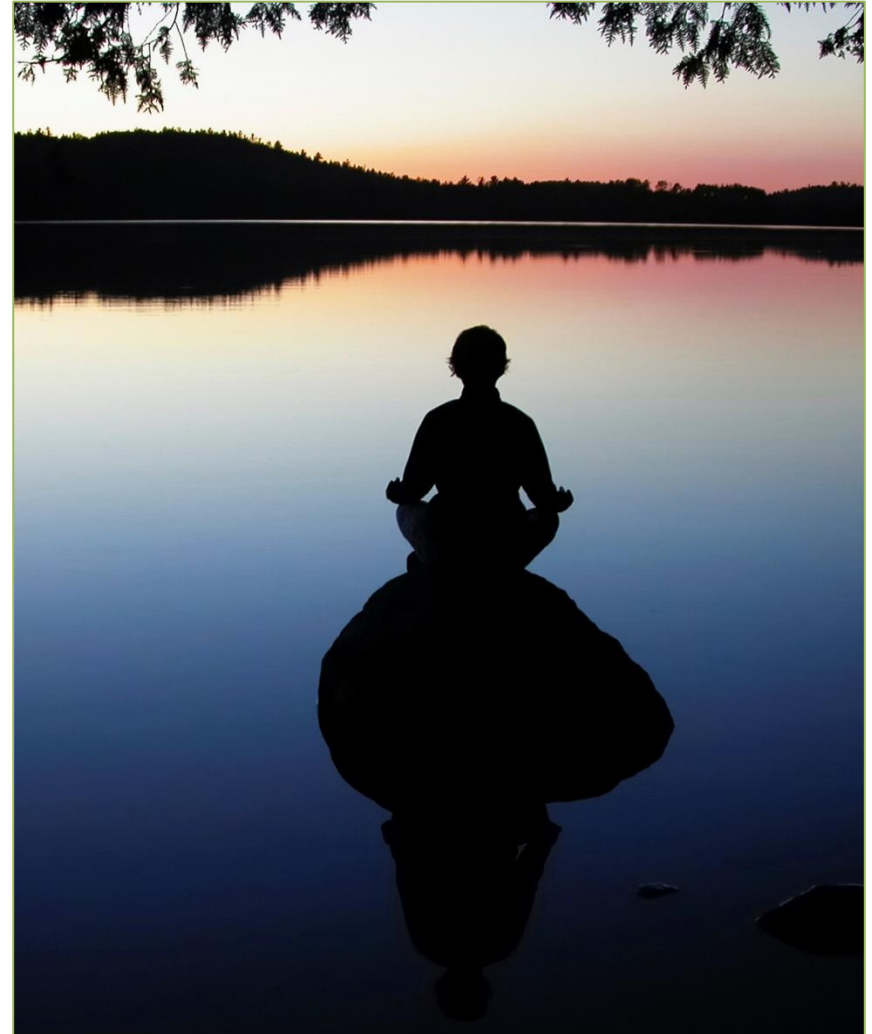
Exercise

- Releases endorphins
- Improves mood
- Boosts energy levels
- Promotes better sleep
- Improves your sex life
- Combats chronic diseases
- Has a protective effect on the brain and mental functioning
- **Can be done at no cost!**



Stress Management – Physical

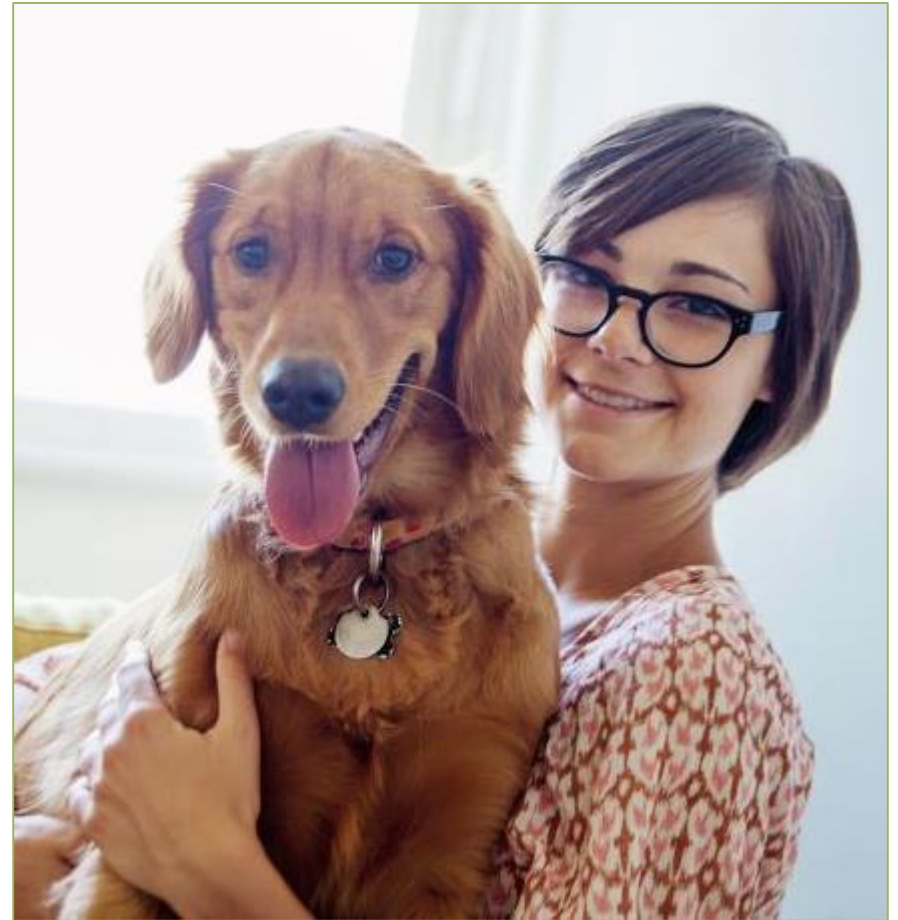
- Relaxation
- Mindfulness
- Jacobsen Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Visualization techniques
- Breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Tai Chi
- Massage
- Biofeedback-assisted relaxation



Stress Management – Centering

Figuring out what

- Soothes you
- Recharges your batteries
- Centers you
- Rebalances you
- Is fun for you
- Works best for you





“If you’re a turtle, don’t try to be a race horse;
If you’re a race horse, don’t try to be a turtle.”

Hans Selye



What Soothes You?

What Recharges You?



What Centers You?

What Balances You?



What Works Best For You?



Long-Term Stress Management Strategies

- Work-life balance
- Practice makes perfect
- Stress inoculation



Self-Examination Question

What are the beliefs that you have that are limiting you from making changes?



Questions?

Contact: Dr. Michael Lacroix
jxlacroix@cvty.com